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# Catering to the Needs of an Aging Workforce: The Role of Employee Age in the Relationship Between Corporate Social Responsibility and Employee Satisfaction

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**Abstract** Contemporary organizations often reciprocate to society for using resources and for affecting stakeholders by engaging in corporate social responsibility (CSR). It has been shown that CSR has a positive impact on employee attitudes. However, not all employees may react equally strongly to CSR practices. Based on socio-emotional selectivity theory (Carstensen in *Science* 312:1913–1915, 2006), we contend that the effect of CSR on employee satisfaction will be more pronounced for older than for younger employees, because CSR practices address those emotional needs and goals that are prioritized when people's future time perspective decreases. In one multi-source field study ( $N = 143$ ) and one experimental study ( $N = 500$ ), we demonstrate that CSR indeed has a stronger positive effect on employee satisfaction for older relative to younger employees. Accordingly, engaging in CSR can be an attractive tool for organizations that aim to keep their aging workforce satisfied with their job.

**Keywords** Corporate social responsibility · Employee age · Future time perspective · Satisfaction · Work attitudes

## Introduction

The steadily rising age of the working population has a tremendous impact on organizational life (Hedge and Borman 2012). One consequence is that organizations need to develop and implement age-sensitive organizational policies and practices (Hertel and Zacher 2015; Truxillo et al. 2015). Specifically, management finds itself challenged with the task to keep older workers satisfied with their work in order to maintain organizational effectiveness. Indeed, research has shown that employee satisfaction is positively related to, for instance, employee motivation, performance, and pro-social work behavior (Ilies et al. 2009; Judge et al. 2001; Ostroff 1992), indicating that organizations may benefit from high levels of satisfaction of their workers. Therefore, identifying factors that positively affect job satisfaction aging workers might provide important benefits to organizations. We argue that corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices might be such a factor.

CSR has been defined as “context-specific organizational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders' expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance” (Aguinis 2011, p. 855). In this definition, stakeholders are those (groups of) individuals who can affect or are affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives or who have a direct or indirect interest in the company (Verdeyen et al. 2004). By engaging in CSR activities (ranging from donations and protecting consumer rights to developing socially responsible products and services), organizations thus aim to reciprocate to society for using ecological resources and for affecting employees, customers, and the wider social fabric in order to legitimately make a profit. A growing body of evidence indicates that the extent to which

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an organization exhibits CSR also substantially affects a stakeholder group that arguably is of primary importance to the organization: the employees within the company. Indeed, CSR has been shown to positively affect employee attitudes and work-related behaviors (Aguinis and Glavas 2012; Rupp et al. 2013).

The current study builds on this research and investigates employee age as a potentially crucial moderator in the relationship between CSR and employee satisfaction. Based on socio-emotional selectivity theory (Carstensen 2006), we contend that the effect of CSR on employee satisfaction will be more pronounced for older employees compared to younger employees, because CSR practices address exactly those needs and goals that are stronger when people's future time perspective is more limited. This research contributes to our understanding of CSR by identifying age as a factor that may explain why some employees react more strongly to CSR practices than others. Notably, insight into the way age affects the relationship between CSR and employee satisfaction is of particular importance, since the average age of the workforce in many developed countries has been increasing and will further increase over the years to come (Ng and Feldman 2010; Schalk et al. 2010).

### The Effects of CSR on Employee Satisfaction

Although most studies have taken a macro-perspective on CSR (focusing, for instance, on the effects of CSR at the institutional or organizational level), the number of studies that have taken a micro-level perspective (e.g., focusing on the effect that CSR efforts have on individuals) is increasing (see Aguinis and Glavas 2012). So far, research that has taken a micro-level perspective on CSR has shown that working for socially responsible companies is positively related to employees' organizational identification (Carmeli et al. 2007), work engagement (Glavas and Piderit 2009), retention (Jones 2010), organizational citizenship behavior (OCB; Jones 2010; Lin et al. 2010; Sully de Luque et al. 2008), organizational commitment (Maignan et al. 1999; Mueller et al. 2012; Peterson 2004; Turker 2009b), in-role performance (Jones 2010; Vlachos et al. 2014), improved employee relations (Agle et al. 1999), and firm attractiveness to prospective employees (Turban and Greening 1997). Another important outcome variable, and one that is of specific interest to the present argument, is employee satisfaction. Employee satisfaction has been defined as an affective attachment to the job, or as a pleasurable emotional state resulting from the positive evaluation or appraisal of one's job experiences (Locke 1976). This means that employee satisfaction can be seen as a global positive feeling about the job, or as an inter-related set of positive attitudes about various aspects or

facets of the job. A well-established predictor of job satisfaction is the congruence between employees' work values and perceived opportunities to fulfill these values at their job, often described as needs-supply fit (e.g., Cable and DeRue 2002; Kristof-Brown et al. 2005). Several studies have shown that CSR is positively related to employee satisfaction (see Ellemers et al. 2011; Tziner et al. 2011; Valentine and Fleischman 2008; Zhu et al. 2014). This effect has been found to be particularly strong when employees perceive the CSR practice to reflect intrinsic organizational values rather than extrinsic promotionally driven motivations (Vlachos et al. 2013).

The reason why CSR is related to employee satisfaction is generally seen in CSR's capability to reduce the discrepancy between what employees receive and what they need or want to receive from work (Bauman and Skitka 2012; Rupp et al. 2006). For example, Bauman and Skitka (2012) argue that CSR can positively affect job satisfaction because it addresses people's need for a meaningful existence and provides them with a feeling of belonging to a larger social entity that has a positive identity. Vlachos et al. (2014) likewise argued that CSR is ethically imbued and thus expresses organizational values like warmth, communion, and morality (Bauman and Skitka 2012), which in turn may foster positive employee attitudes. Rupp et al. (2006) offer similar reasons as to why CSR may positively affect employee attitudes. Specifically, they hypothesize that CSR fosters favorable employee attitudes because CSR addresses three specific needs. Firstly, CSR addresses belongingness needs by nurturing relationships between the organization, its employees, and the various members of society, and by providing employees with a positive identity. Secondly, CSR addresses control needs by providing employees with a feeling of security, based on the perception that if the organization is concerned about the effect of its activities on people and communities outside the organization, it will also take the own employees' needs into consideration. Lastly, CSR addresses the need for a meaningful existence by providing employees with the knowledge that they work for an organization that is just in its interactions with the larger social milieu (cf., Rupp 2011).

However, if CSR affects employee satisfaction because it has the potential to satisfy multiple employee needs, one would expect the strength of the effect to differ between individuals. After all, needs may differ strongly between employees. For example, needs, motives, and values are influenced by adult development and work experiences across the life span (Kooij et al. 2011; Truxillo et al. 2015). Given that CSR addresses various employee needs and motives, and that these needs and motives are partly determined by life span characteristics, one would expect the effects of CSR on employee satisfaction to be

moderated by employee chronological age. Existing research on CSR has largely neglected chronological age as a potential variable of interest, which leaves it unclear to what extent the effects of CSR differ in strength across the working life span. In light of workforce aging (Ng and Feldman 2010), insight into this matter is of particular importance.

### The Role of Employee Age in Effects of CSR

One theory that may explain how employee age may affect sensitivity to CSR practices is Carstensen's (2006) socio-emotional selectivity theory. This theory explains age differences in social activities and emotional experiences of adults via changes in social goals (Carstensen et al. 1999). According to the theory, social goals can be broadly classified into two categories: those related to instrumental purposes and those related to emotional meaning. When individuals perceive their future time as more limited, they prioritize emotionally meaningful social goals, such as generativity, emotional intimacy, and feelings of social embeddedness. In contrast, when individuals perceive their future time as more expansive, they prioritize instrumental social goals, such as knowledge acquisition and status attainment (Carstensen et al. 1999; Lang and Carstensen 2002; Treadway et al. 2010). Notably, as individuals grow older, their future time perspective becomes more limited. As a consequence, they are assumed to strategically reorganize their goal hierarchies such that emotionally meaningful goals are increasingly prioritized over knowledge acquisition goals (Carstensen 1991). Thus, the older the people get, the less value they place on learning, gathering knowledge, and acquiring resources that may only pay off in the distant future. Instead, they place more value on deriving meaning from life, establishing intimacy with others in the present, and developing a sense of belonging in the social environment. The basic premises of the theory were confirmed in research of social motivation in general (Lang and Carstensen 2002) and in the workplace (Kooij et al. 2011). For example, Kooij et al. (2011) performed a meta-analysis on age differences in work motivation and found that younger workers tend to place greater emphasis on knowledge gathering and career development, whereas older workers prioritize a sense of accomplishment, job security, and helping others. In addition, generativity, or the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation, is shown to increase with age (McAdams et al. 1993; Zacher et al. 2012; Lang and Carstensen 2002; Kooij et al. 2011).

The notion that age heightens the emphasis placed on emotionally meaningful goals, such as the need of belonging in the social environment, the need to feel safe and secure in one's environment, and generative concerns

to guide the next generation, suggests that employees may become more responsive to CSR practices as they get older. Put differently, CSR would seem to address precisely the types of emotional needs and goals that get stronger with age. As a consequence, the relationship between CSR and employee satisfaction is likely to be more pronounced when employees are older.

Although, to our knowledge, no study has directly tested this hypothesis, a couple of studies do seem to corroborate our line of reasoning. For instance, in a recent study by Scheibe et al. (2015), it is argued that job satisfaction is driven by the positive evaluation that the job supplies experiences in line with employees' needs and desires (Kristof-Brown et al. 2005), and that older adults, compared with young adults, prioritize goals related to emotional well-being (Carstensen 2006). Therefore, so the authors argued, if the organizational context hampers emotional well-being goals it should affect older workers more than younger ones. Corroborating their line of reasoning, they found that if the organization required employees to display other emotions than they actually felt (thus creating emotional dissonance; Morris and Feldman 1996), this dampened older adults' job satisfaction more than it did younger adults' job satisfaction. In addition, the results of a survey of employees showed that older employees' job satisfaction was more strongly reduced when they experienced an incongruence of work values and job characteristics than was the satisfaction of young adults (Krumm et al. 2013).

Notably, several previous empirical studies also suggest that older employees may be more sensitive to CSR practices than younger employees. For instance, research has shown that older people's concern about CSR is greater than that of younger people (Shaouki 2011), and that older employees are more motivated than younger employees by intrinsically rewarding job features—like knowing that what the organization does is ethically correct (Inceoglu et al. 2012). However, these studies did not address the hypothesis that the relation between CSR and employees' work-related attitudes (such as job satisfaction) is moderated by employee age. Testing this hypothesis therefore was the aim of the current paper.

**Hypothesis 1:** The relationship between CSR and employee satisfaction is moderated by employee age, such that this relationship is stronger among older employees than among younger employees.

### Overview of the Present Research

We first conducted a multi-level study to test our hypothesis that CSR will be more positively related to employee satisfaction with increasing employee age. Study 1 includes

validated measures of CSR (Turker 2009a) and employee satisfaction (Spector 1985). Notably, the measure of CSR allowed us to distinguish between four separate dimensions of CSR and to test whether the hypothesized relationship holds across CSR dimensions. Moreover, in this study we were able to collect multi-source data, with organizational managers and CEOs filling in the CSR measure for their organization, and employees filling in the employee satisfaction and chronological age measures. Following a discussion of the results of this study, we introduce our second study. In this experimental study, we manipulated CSR and measured employee age and satisfaction.

## Method Study 1

### Respondents and Procedure

A total of 305 organizations located in the Netherlands were approached via email and through phone calls to seek their participation. This resulted in the cooperation of 54 organizations (18 % response rate). The relatively low overall response rate is consistent with those of studies using a similar approach (i.e., sending questionnaires to organizational managers, business owners, or CEOs); reported response rates of participating organizations vary between 13 and 25 % (see Baron and Tang 2011; Hmieleski and Ensley 2007). Each organization was asked to fill in several questionnaires. One questionnaire, measuring CSR, was filled in by organizational managers, business owners, or CEOs ( $N = 54$ ). The other questionnaire, measuring satisfaction and age, was filled in by employees ( $N = 143$ ). We had indicated that we would like 4 employees per organization to fill in the employee questionnaire, but not all organizations complied with this request, leaving us with almost 3 respondents per participating organization (and 66 % of the number we would have had if all organizations would have provided us with 4 respondents). Questionnaires were completed online; after answering the last questions, responses were submitted and saved automatically.<sup>1</sup>

The resulting convenience sample of participating organizations was diverse, but most of the organizations were commercially oriented (service) organizations (e.g., shops, financial institutions, healthcare organizations, etc.). We did not gather detailed information about the size of the companies that participated, but we know that some

companies were small and others large. We stressed the fact that participation was voluntary and that we would treat the data confidentially. Because people often completed the questionnaire during work hours, we kept it short and to the point. A total of 39.9 % of the participating employees were male, and 58.1 % of the employees were female (two employees did not indicate their gender). On average, employees worked 8.33 years with their current employer ( $SD = 8.97$ ). Most employees worked more than 24 h a week (88.6 %), and 59.3 % held an Applied Sciences or University degree.

### Measures

#### *Corporate Social Responsibility*

We used a Dutch translation of the scale developed by Turker (2009a) to measure CSR. Organizational managers, business owners, or CEOs of our 54 organizations responded to the items of this scale. The scale consists of 17 items and can be split up into 4 dimensions. The first dimension is CSR toward social and non-social stakeholders (*CSR-social*). This dimension contains CSR with regard to society, natural environment, next generations, and non-governmental organizations. A representative item from this subscale is “Our company makes investments to create a better life for the future generations.” The second dimension is CSR toward employees (*CSR-employees*). This form of CSR contains activities which are directly related to the physical and psychological working environment of employees. An example item is: “Our company implements flexible policies to provide a good work and life balance for its employees.” The third dimension is CSR toward customers (*CSR-customers*). A representative item from this subscale is “Customer satisfaction is highly important for our company.” Finally, the fourth dimension is CSR toward government (*CSR-government*); this dimension is concerned with the extent to which the company meets legal requirements and pays its taxes. A representative item is: “Our company always pays its taxes on a regular and continuing basis.” The CSR scale uses a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). We used the average score of all 17 items as an indicator of general CSR as is more often done in studies on CSR (see Tziner et al. 2011).

#### *Employee Satisfaction*

We used a Dutch 18-item version of the Job Satisfaction Survey developed by Spector (1985). The scale uses a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 6 = *strongly agree*). Representative items are: “I like the things I do at work” and “I sometimes feel my job is meaningless (R).”

<sup>1</sup> A couple of participants filled in paper-and-pencil versions of the questionnaire. Those questionnaires were collected by a research assistant.



**Table 1** Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alphas, and intercorrelations for the Study 1 variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Tenure (years)	8.33	8.97	—						
2. Working hours	—	—	.09	—					
3. Education	—	—	-.04	.14	—				
4. Gender	—	—	-.20*	-.31**	-.03	—			
5. CSR	3.90	0.53	-.12	.31**	.06	-.08	(.81)		
6. Employee age	36.63	11.40	.64**	.21*	-.14	-.19*	.06	—	
7. Employee satisfaction	4.39	0.51	-.12	-.12	-.05	.06	-.01	-.19*	(.78)

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$  (two-tailed significance). Cronbach's alpha coefficients are displayed on the diagonal in parentheses. Also note that this table is based on employee data, but that employees were nested within organizations for the measurement of CSR

### Employee Age and Control Variables

Employees' chronological age was measured by asking respondent how old they were. Employees' chronological ages ranged from 17 to 64 years (fourteen employees did not indicate their age). We controlled for gender because research has shown that women tend to have higher job satisfaction than men (Phelan 1994). In addition, we controlled for tenure, number of working hours per week, and education level to rule out the possibility that age effects would be due to older people working longer for the same employer than younger employees, working fewer hours per week, or having lower education than younger employees (cf., Walter and Scheibe 2013).

## Results Study 1

Table 1 includes descriptives and intercorrelations of the study variables. Because our data included predictors at both the individual level (employee age) and the group level (CSR), we used multi-level analysis to test our hypotheses in this study (e.g., Hox 2010; Snijders and Bosker 2012). The “deviance test” on our main dependent variable, employee satisfaction (see Hox 2010), showed that the data indeed had a multi-level structure ( $\chi^2 = 5.57$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .02$ ).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Although both measures were well known and validated in other studies, we performed confirmatory factor analyses for both measures. For satisfaction, fit indices were:  $\chi^2(135) = 221.92$ ,  $p < .001$ , RMSEA = .07, CFI = .87. Given the different level and direction of kurtosis for the items of the satisfaction scale, we used heterogeneous kurtosis (HK) estimations (Bentler and Wu 2004). The AVE of this measure was .50. We analyzed our CSR measure by assessing a bi-factor model—a multidimensional structural model specifying that each item on a measure is an indicator of a single factor (labeled the “target” dimension), and each item also is an indicator of one (or more) orthogonal group factors (see Reise et al. 2012). This model is applicable given that our CSR measure assesses both general CSR and its 4 sub-components. The fit indices were  $\chi^2(102) = 159.447$ ,  $p < .001$ , RMSEA = .099, CFI = .86. The AVE

We performed a multi-level regression with standardized values (i.e., Z scores) of organizational CSR, employee age, and their cross-level interaction as predictors, and employee satisfaction as dependent variable. We controlled for number of working hours per week, tenure, education, and gender.<sup>3</sup> In this regression model, we did not find any main effects (see Table 2), but congruent with our hypothesis we found a significant interaction between CSR and employee age (see Fig. 1). Simple slopes analyses (at 1 SD above and below the mean) showed that CSR was positively associated with employee satisfaction for older employees (estimate = 1.82, 95 % CI = [0.62, 3.02],  $p < .001$ ) and negatively associated with employee satisfaction for younger employees (estimate = -1.63, 95 % CI = [-2.78, -0.48],  $p < .001$ ).

Because our CSR measure was previously found to be multi-dimensional in nature (Turker 2009a, b), we further conducted analyses (identical to the one reported above) with the separate subscales of the measure as independent variables. Results of these analyses are reported in Table 3. In essence, results show that the interactive effect of CSR and employee age on employee satisfaction was significant for CSR toward customers and toward employees, and marginally significant for CSR toward government. The one dimension of CSR that failed to show a significant interaction effect with employee age was CSR toward social and non-social stakeholders. As in the prior analysis, there were no main effects of the different types of CSR on employee satisfaction.

Footnote 2 continued

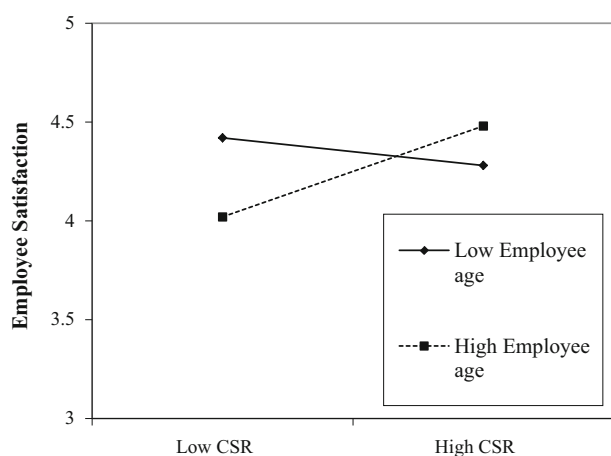
of this measure was .49. Note that the results are based on sample sizes that are often considered small when conducting factor analyses.

<sup>3</sup> We also conducted these analyses without adding any control variables. This did not change the pattern of results.

**Table 2** Study 1 multi-level analyses for corporate social responsibility (CSR) effects on satisfaction as moderated by employee age

	Estimate	95 % CI	
		<i>L</i>	<i>U</i>
Intercept	4.38 <sup>a</sup>	2.81	5.95
Tenure	0.02	−0.13	0.18
Working hours	−0.01	−0.12	0.10
Education	−0.00	−0.11	0.11
Gender	0.07	−0.14	0.29
CSR	0.10	−0.02	0.22
Employee age	−0.01	−0.14	0.13
CSR × employee age	0.15 <sup>a</sup>	0.05	0.25

<sup>a</sup> CI for the estimate does not contain zero. *L* and *U* = 95 % confidence interval lower and upper bound, respectively

**Fig. 1** Employee satisfaction as a function of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and employee age ( $\pm 1$  SD) in Study 1

## Discussion Study 1

We found that CSR was positively related to employee satisfaction when employees were older rather than younger. This supports our core hypothesis that the relation between CSR and employee satisfaction is moderated by employees' chronological age. Based on socio-emotional selectivity theory (Carstensen 2006), we argued that when people grow older, their future time perspective becomes more limited, and as a consequence, more emphasis is placed on emotionally meaningful goals, the need to see oneself as an integrated part of the social environment, the need to feel safe and secure in one's environment, and the need to take care of future generations. As CSR addresses precisely these types of needs, the relationship between CSR and employee satisfaction was expected to be stronger to the extent that employees are older.

**Table 3** Study 1 multi-level analyses for the four corporate social responsibility (CSR) subcomponents

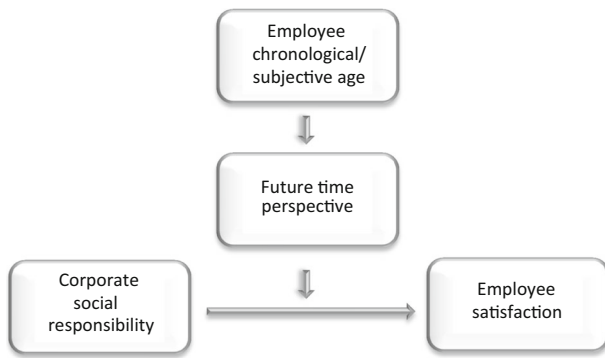
	Estimate	95 % CI	
		<i>L</i>	<i>U</i>
Intercept	4.31 <sup>a</sup>	4.13	4.48
CSR-social	0.02	−0.11	0.15
Employee age	−0.01	−0.15	0.13
CSR-social × employee age	0.07	−0.04	0.20
Intercept	4.34 <sup>a</sup>	4.17	4.51
CSR-employees	0.12	−0.00	0.24
Employee age	−0.02	−0.15	0.12
CSR-employees × employee age	0.12 <sup>a</sup>	0.02	0.22
Intercept	4.34 <sup>a</sup>	4.17	4.51
CSR-customers	0.06	−0.06	0.18
Employee age	−0.01	−0.14	0.13
CSR-customers × employee age	0.14 <sup>a</sup>	0.04	0.23
Intercept	4.32 <sup>a</sup>	4.15	4.50
CSR-government	0.08	−0.05	0.21
Employee age	−0.03	−0.16	0.11
CSR-government × employee age	0.09 <sup>b</sup>	−0.00	0.18

Entries are estimates controlled for gender, education, working hours and tenure

<sup>a</sup> CI for the estimate does not contain zero

<sup>b</sup> One-sided significance. *L* and *U* = 95 % confidence interval lower and upper bound, respectively

Yet, Study 1 has some limitations that we tried to address in a follow-up study. Firstly, the study relied on correlational data, which limits the potential to draw causal conclusions. Secondly, we argued that alterations in future time perspective may explain why age moderates the effects of CSR on employee satisfaction, but Study 1 did not test the mediating qualities of future time perspective. Thirdly, so far we have focused on employee chronological age. However, the literature on aging shows that age can be operationalized in a number of ways (Sterns and Miklos 1995; Settersten and Mayer 1997). Indeed, it has been argued that chronological aging is only one sub-process of this general process of aging (Kooij et al. 2013). Another way in which the aging process may be studied is by taking subjective age into account. Individuals' subjective age (the degree to which a person subjectively feels or is perceived by others as older or younger) may also affect employees' responses to CSR because it may—comparable to chronological age—affect individuals' future time horizon and thus their needs, priorities, and goals (cf., Walter and Scheibe 2013). Studying the degree to which the effects of Study 1 generalize to other operationalizations of age will help us gain more insight into the actual mechanisms underlying these effects.



**Fig. 2** Research model depicting the proposed combined effects of age, future time perspective, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and employee satisfaction in Study 2

Our second study is geared toward addressing these issues. Specifically, we conducted an experimental study with a manipulation of CSR, which makes causal inferences possible. We measured employee satisfaction and also added a measure of subjective age and future time perspective, making it possible to test the following hypothesis (see Fig. 2):

**Hypothesis 2:** Employees' (chronological and subjective) age is negatively related to their future time perspective and therefore moderates the relationship between CSR and employee satisfaction. The effect of CSR on employee satisfaction is more positive for older rather than younger employees because their projected future is shorter.

## Method Study 2

### Respondents and Design

A total of 500 employees from a diverse set of industries in the Netherlands (52.6 % male) participated in an online business scenario experiment.<sup>4</sup> Respondents were recruited using the services of a Dutch agency that recruits representative samples of the Dutch population for research purposes. To make sure that all age groups were sufficiently represented, we relied on a stratified random sampling procedure (see Sapsford and Jupp 2006). Specifically, we stratified by five levels of age (18–27, 28–37, 38–47, 48–57, and 58–67 years). In addition, only respondents holding a paid position for at least 2 days a week were allowed to participate. Therefore, all respondents—including the older ones—had recent work experiences,

<sup>4</sup> We originally had a sample of 526 respondents. However, 26 respondents were not included in the analyses because they did not finish the study or because they indicated having experienced difficulties with the study.

enhancing the likelihood that participants could imagine the work-related situation described. Respondents with a higher education (i.e., bachelor's degree or higher) made up 60.4 % of the sample. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (Corporate social responsibility: low vs. high) in a between-subjects design.

### Procedure and Manipulations

After answering some questions pertaining to, for instance, age and future time perspective, respondents were informed that they would start with a second, unrelated study. For this study, respondents were given a scenario describing a hypothetical company and were asked to imagine that they had been working for this company for some time. We asked respondents to imagine that they found themselves thinking about this company, and that while doing so, a couple of thoughts came to mind. These thoughts constituted our *corporate social responsibility manipulation* (which we based on items from the CSR scale by Turker 2009a). In the *low corporate social responsibility* condition, respondents read that it was clear to them that the organization they worked for cared little about creating sustainable value for clients, employees, shareholders, and the wider social fabric. They were then given examples. For instance, participants read "...You realize that the organization you work for also never donates money to schools, hospitals or other societally relevant projects. Neither does your organization ever encourage employees to become involved in the communities in which they live and work. The organization does not participate in projects that aim to minimize the organization's negative impacts on the natural environment, nor does it invest in projects aiming to create job opportunities for future generations. The company targets immediate growth."

In the *high corporate social responsibility* condition, respondents read that it was clear to them that the organization they worked for cared a lot about creating sustainable value for clients, employees, shareholders, and the wider social fabric. They were then also given examples. For instance, these participants read "...You realize that the organization you work for also donates money to schools, hospitals or other societally relevant projects. In addition, your organization encourages employees to become involved in the communities in which they live and work. The organization participates in projects that aim to minimize the organization's negative impacts on the natural environment, and it invests in projects aiming to create job opportunities for future generations. The company targets sustainable growth."

Next, respondents were asked to answer additional questions representing our dependent variables and manipulation checks and then were thanked for their participation. Notably, all participation was voluntary and



anonymous. In return for participation, respondents were awarded points that could be saved and ultimately swapped for gift coupons.

## Measures

### *Manipulation Check*

To assess whether our manipulation of corporate social responsibility was successful, we developed a five-item scale. Sample items are: “This organization acts responsibly with regard to its own employees” and “This organization takes society, the natural environment, and next generations into account,” rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *disagree*; 5 = *agree*). The scale ( $M = 3.12$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ) had excellent internal reliability (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .96$ ).

### *Employee Satisfaction*

The measure of employee satisfaction was introduced by telling respondents that the items concerned how they would feel if they were to work in the described organization. Firstly, we used the Andrews and Withey (1976) job satisfaction scale, and adapted it to the scenario context. Rentsch and Steel (1992) evaluated the psychometric properties of this scale, and their results supported the validity and reliability of this measure. Moreover, the scale correlated highly with alternative measures of overall job satisfaction. Sample items of the four-item scale are: “How would you feel about your job?” and “How would you feel about the work you would do in this organization?” Respondents could respond on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *terrible*; 7 = *delighted*), and responses were averaged into a single satisfaction score ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 1.76$ ). The scale had excellent internal reliability (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .97$ ).

### *Future Time Perspective*

Future time perspective was assessed with a Dutch version of the Future Time Perspective Scale developed by Carstensen and Lang (1996). Participants rated the degree to which they agreed with each of 10 items (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). Sample items are “Many opportunities await me in the future” and “Most of my life still lies ahead of me.” The internal consistency was very good with  $\alpha = .89$  ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ).

### *Employee Age and Control Variables*

Employees’ chronological age was measured by asking respondent how old they were. Employees’ chronological

ages ranged from 18 to 65 years ( $M = 43.18$ ,  $SD = 13.10$ ). Employees’ subjective age was measured with a Dutch translation of the Shore et al. (2003) four-item scale that asked people to indicate the age that most closely corresponds to (a) the way they generally feel, (b) the way they look, (c) the age of people whose interests and activities are most like theirs, and (d) the age that they would most like to be. The internal consistency was very good with  $\alpha = .90$  ( $M = 27.88$ ,  $SD = 10.46$ ). We also controlled for gender, working hours per week, and education level.

## Results Study 2

### *Manipulation Check*

An independent samples  $t$  test showed that employees in the high corporate social responsibility condition ( $M = 4.16$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ) perceived the organization to be more socially responsible than those in the low corporate social responsibility condition ( $M = 2.13$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ),  $t(498) = -26.04$ ,  $p < .001$  (mean difference = 2.03, 95 % CI =  $[-2.18, -1.87]$ ). These results demonstrate that the manipulation worked as intended.

### *Hypothesis Testing*

#### *CSR and the Moderating Effect of Employee Chronological Age*

We performed a regression with CSR (dummy coded 0 = *low CSR*; 1 = *high CSR*), the standardized measure of employee chronological age, and their interaction as predictors, and employee satisfaction as dependent variable. We controlled for number of working hours per week, education, and gender (see Table 4).<sup>5</sup> We only found a main effect of CSR, showing that participants would experience higher satisfaction when working in a socially responsible organization than when working in an organization that is not socially responsible. Congruent with our second hypothesis, we found a significant interaction between CSR and employee chronological age. Simple slopes analyses (at 1 SD above and below the mean) showed that our CSR manipulation more strongly affected employee satisfaction when employees were older (estimate = 2.82, 95 % CI =  $[2.52, 3.12]$ ,  $p < .001$ ) than

<sup>5</sup> We also added measures of the independent self and of the interdependent self as potential control variables to Study 3 (see Johnson et al. 2006). However, adding those variables did not have a substantial effect on our results.

**Table 4** Study 2 regression results for corporate social responsibility (CSR) effects on employee satisfaction as moderated by employee age

	Coefficient	95 % CI	
		<i>L</i>	<i>U</i>
Intercept	3.52 <sup>a</sup>	2.40	4.65
Working hours	−0.03	−0.20	0.14
Education	−0.01	−0.19	0.17
Gender	−0.08	−0.31	0.14
CSR	1.75 <sup>a</sup>	1.02	2.48
Employee age	−0.01	−0.02	0.00
CSR × employee age	0.02 <sup>a</sup>	0.00	0.04

<sup>a</sup> CI for the estimate does not contain zero. *L* and *U* = 95 % confidence interval lower and upper bound, respectively. CSR indicates the condition (0 = low CSR, 1 = high CSR)

when employees were younger (estimate = 2.32, 95 % CI = [2.02, 2.62],  $p < .001$ ).

#### *CSR and the Moderating Effect of Employee Subjective Age*

Next, we conducted a regression analysis with CSR, employee subjective age, and their interaction as predictors, and employee satisfaction as dependent variable (including the same control variables as in the prior analysis). We again found the main effect of CSR (estimate = 1.15, 95 % CI = [0.76, 2.36],  $p < .001$ ). We also found a significant interaction between CSR and employee subjective age ( $b = 0.03$ , 95 % CI = [0.01, 0.05],  $p < .05$ ). Simple slopes analyses (at 1 SD above and below the mean) showed that our CSR manipulation more strongly affected employee satisfaction when employees felt older (estimate = 2.85, 95 % CI = [2.55, 3.15],  $p < .001$ ) than when employees felt younger (estimate = 2.29, 95 % CI = [1.99, 2.59],  $p < .001$ ).

#### *Mediated Moderation*

To test the hypothesized mediated moderation (*Hypothesis 2*), we relied on Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro (Model 14). In this model, future time perspective is predicted by age, and this in turn affects the relationship between CSR and employee satisfaction. As expected, the findings indicated that chronological age was negatively associated with future time perspective,  $b = -0.03$ , 95 % CI = [−0.04, −0.03],  $p < .001$ . We again found that employees indicated to be more satisfied when CSR was high rather than low ( $b = 3.52$ , 95 % CI = [2.57, 4.48],  $p < .001$ ). Moreover, future time perspective was positively associated with employee satisfaction ( $b = 0.21$ , 95 % CI = [0.05, 0.37],

$p < .001$ ). In addition, future time perspective and corporate social responsibility interactively predicted job satisfaction,  $b = -0.22$ , 95 % CI = [−0.43, −0.00],  $p < .05$ . Simple slopes analyses (at 1 SD above and below the mean) showed that our CSR manipulation more strongly affected employee satisfaction when employees felt that they had less time left in their future (effect = 2.85, 95 % CI = [2.49, 3.09],  $p < .001$ ) than when employees felt that they had more time left in their future (effect = 2.35, 95 % CI = [2.05, 2.66],  $p < .001$ ). Most importantly, bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals (CIs) provided support for the proposed mediating effect of future time perspective in the interactive effect of CSR and chronological age (index = 0.007, 95 % CI = [0.00, 0.02]).

To assess whether subjective age would also moderate the effects of CSR via future time perspective, we conducted another mediated moderation analysis relying on Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro (Model 14). The findings indicate that subjective age was also negatively associated with future time perspective,  $b = -0.04$ , 95 % CI = [−0.04, −0.03],  $p < .001$ . Bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals (CIs) also provided support for the proposed mediating effect of future time perspective in the interactive effect of CSR and chronological age (index = 0.008, 95 % CI = [0.00, 0.02]).

## **Discussion**

Nowadays, many organizations engage in activities ranging from making donations and protecting consumer rights to developing socially responsible products and services. Companies that engage in such corporate social responsible practices are affecting not only their customers and wider society, but also the individuals who work for them. Our results support and extend previous studies that pertain to the effects of CSR on employees. In both studies, we found consistent support for our core hypothesis that the relation between CSR and employee satisfaction is moderated by employee age. In addition, in our second study we also found support for a mediating role of future time perspective. As expected, and in accordance with socio-emotional selectivity theory (Carstensen 2006), we found that age, via future time perspective, moderated the relationship between CSR and employee satisfaction. When people see that their future time becomes more limited, they presumably place more emphasis on emotionally meaningful goals, the need to see themselves as an integrated part of their social environment, the need to feel safe and secure in one's environment, and the need to take care of future generations. As CSR addresses precisely these types of needs, the relationship between CSR and employee satisfaction was expected—and found—to be stronger to the extent that employees

are older. This finding is of importance, because it testifies to the notion that needs, motives, and values of people differ across the life span, which may explain differential effects of CSR practices on employees with varying ages. Employee age has received little attention in research on the effects of CSR so far. The present studies demonstrate the value of giving employee age more consideration—especially since the workforce's age is increasing rapidly.

Nevertheless, although the results of the two studies were highly consistent in terms of our core hypothesis (i.e., the predicted age moderation), they also differed in interesting ways. Study 1 did not reveal a main effect of CSR for an average value of employee age, while the model in Study 2 did. This difference in findings is intriguing and calls for discussion. One potential explanation relates to the way we approached CSR in the studies. In Study 1, CSR was assessed by asking managers, business owners, or CEO's about the extent to which the company engaged in CSR. In Study 2, we manipulated employees' perception of the CSR engagement of a hypothetical organization. As employee satisfaction is determined by the extent to which employees themselves believe that their needs or wants from work are being met, their perception of CSR is potentially more influential than CSR as reported by others. Indeed, it has been argued that in general, perceptions of CSR may exert stronger effects on employee attitudes than 'objective' accounts of CSR or than CSR as rated by others (Glavas and Godwin 2013). This may thus explain why Studies 2 reveals CSR effects in our regression model, while Study 1 does not.

Our findings suggest that the combined effect of CSR and employee age on employee satisfaction is relatively subtle. Interestingly, the results of our first study may help us to explain the relatively small effect found in the second study. That is, if we take a closer look at the results for the separate dimensions of CSR in Study 1, we find no support for our interaction hypothesis for CSR toward social and non-social stakeholders (CSR-social). This form of CSR is actually highly represented in our manipulation of CSR in Study 2 which may explain the relatively small effect sizes in this study. In addition, the fact that age-related differences between employees may be partly attributable to differences between birth cohorts (Smola and Sutton 2002) may help us to understand why the interaction between CSR-social and age was not significant. It may be that the increasing economic wealth has led particularly the younger cohort to have increased environmental concerns (see Furrer et al. 2010). Moreover, older individuals prioritize emotionally meaningful goals, and therefore, they benefit more from smaller social networks comprised of more familiar and emotionally close social partners (Löckenhoff and Carstensen 2004). This suggests that CSR activities that focus on stakeholders who are psychologically closer to respective employees may be perceived as being especially valuable to older

employees. Arguably, CSR activities that focus on employees, customers, or the own government focus on stakeholders who are more familiar and emotionally close than CSR activities that focus on more distal and abstract entities like the environment or future generations.

In Study 1—though not in Study 2—we found that CSR was actually negatively related to employee satisfaction among younger employees. How can we explain this finding? In Study 1, we had organizational managers, business owners, and CEOs fill in the CSR questionnaire. Given that the goal of acquiring knowledge and instrumental outcomes often competes with goals that are emotionally meaningful (Carstensen 2006), our findings in this study could reflect the possibility that in organizations in which more attention is paid to CSR (which is expected to cater to emotional goals), less attention is paid to providing own employees with the possibilities to acquire knowledge or to reach instrumental goals. This trade-off between CSR and the possibilities to acquire knowledge would be particularly hard on younger employees, as they prioritize such goals. Although we cannot come to a definite conclusion on these issues based on our studies, we would welcome future research that would test this assumption.

### Strengths, Weaknesses, and Potential Future Endeavors

The presented studies have both strengths and shortcomings. Apart from the theoretical contributions that our studies have to offer, a strength is the converging evidence for the interplay between CSR and employee age using studies employing different methodologies (i.e., a multi-source field study and an experimental study), different measurements, and different samples. The multi-study approach also has the benefit that the strengths of one study may compensate for the weaknesses of another study which substantially bolsters our confidence in the findings. For instance, while our first study has the potential weakness of including a relatively small number of participants, the sample size of our second study is markedly larger. In a similar vein, while our second study may be criticized for being low on ecological validity, our first study is much stronger in that regard.

Yet, there are also a couple of limitations that concern both studies. One such limitation is that our studies do not allow for inferences regarding intra-individual changes across the life span (Van der Velde et al. 1998). That is, future research needs to employ longitudinal and cohort-sequential designs to better disentangle aging and cohort effects on the relationship between CSR and employee attitudes and to draw more definite causal conclusions.

Another potential limitation of the studies is that they included a general, broad operationalization of employee satisfaction. In our studies, satisfaction was approached as

a concept that reflected employees' global positive feeling about the job (as an interrelated set of positive attitudes about various aspects or facets of the job). However, many scholars argue that employee satisfaction can be seen as a multi-dimensional construct, comprising many facets like pay satisfaction, co-worker satisfaction, supervisor satisfaction, and satisfaction with the job itself (e.g., Jones-Johnson and Johnson 2000; Vitell and Davis 1990). Such an approach highlights that employees can be more or less satisfied with all kinds of specific work-related aspects. Our decision to focus on the broader concept, and not on smaller sub-dimensions, was not only practical, but also had a theoretical basis. It may be argued that when exploring a new research question, it makes sense to first assess effects on the broader concept before trying to make more fine-grained analyses. That said, we would speculate that the combined effects of CSR and age on sub-dimensions of employee satisfaction may not always mirror those on the broader concept. For instance, pay satisfaction may be less strongly related to CSR, or it may affect younger employees more strongly than older employees because younger employees focus more on instrumental goals. Certainly, these are intriguing issues for future research.

Recently, Vlachos et al. (2014) found that middle managers may be seen as important 'communication vehicles' for spreading the CSR vision to employees (p. 991). They argue that employees' judgments and behaviors are substantially shaped by their managers' attitudinal and behavioral reactions, because subordinates view their superiors as important social referents and tend to form judgments and exhibit behaviors that emulate those of their superiors. This is an interesting point, which may also be relevant to the study of the role of employee age in CSR processes. In fact, it has been suggested that older employees can be valuable mentors to younger employees (Doerwald et al. 2015), which enhances the likelihood that they are seen as role models. As such, a fruitful avenue for future research may be to investigate older employees' role in younger employees' appraisals of and responses to CSR.

Another direction for future research would be to include measures of the various needs that are considered to be affected by age and that are considered to be addressed by CSR (cf., the need for a meaningful existence, the need to belong, etc.). Evidence that these needs and their fulfillment can be used to explain the combined influence of CSR and age on employee satisfaction would further strengthen the confidence in our line of reasoning.

### Practical Implications

This study suggests that companies that engage in CSR practices can expect particularly their growing number of

older employees to respond positively. The present study also suggests that employee perceptions of CSR are particularly important for direct effects of CSR on employee attitudes to occur. This finding may be highly relevant for practice, because it testifies to the importance of organizational image management. For instance, in cases where organizations are in reality much more socially responsible than employees perceive them to be, strategies and practices could be employed to help project a more positive internal image to their employees (e.g., HR initiatives), which in turn (so we anticipate) would strengthen employee satisfaction. Notably, such measures would be important for the satisfaction of both younger and older employees. We also showed that the susceptibility to CSR activities increases with age. This suggests that CSR could be made part of age-conscious labor policies: organizations that want to keep their aging workforce happy and satisfied may consider to engage in or to increase their CSR activities. Our research further suggests that some CSR practices, like the ones that focus more on employees or customers, may be more likely to have beneficial effects on older employees than CSR practices that focus on social or non-social stakeholders. This suggests that if CSR is to be part of an organization's age-conscious labor policies, the organization's management may want to consider which types of CSR activities are most likely to have favorable effects. Notably, the organization should take care not to engage in CSR at the expense of providing employees with the possibility to acquire knowledge or to reach instrumental goals. Such a course of action could be detrimental especially to the satisfaction of younger employees. Note, however, that any inferences for practice should be seen as tentative and as requiring further inquiry.

### Concluding Remarks

Corporate social responsibility practices aim to generate a wide variety of positive consequences for all kinds of stakeholders. These positive consequences do not only concern society at large, future generations or customers, but also the organization's own workforce. The current study shows that especially older employees' satisfaction may be contingent on the extent to which the organization engages in CSR. Given that the workforce in many countries is aging rapidly, this insight may motivate organizations to further engage in CSR activities. We hope that future research will continue to consider how life span theories may inform our understanding of the effects of CSR on employee attitudes.

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